

REMENDER • CRAIG • BOYD

DEADLY CLASS™

WC
16



1988

#20

DIE FOR ME
PART FOUR



The Story So Far...

When homeless orphan San Franciscan teen Marcus Lopez was asked to join Kings Dominion Atelier of the Deadly Arts, a shadowy school specializing in training the next generation of the world's deadliest assassins, he expected trouble wouldn't be far behind. But he had no idea.

Unlike the majority of the alumni, Marcus is not a legacy pledge. As it turns out, these unaffiliated kids cynically referred to as "Rats", have themselves become the final exam for their more privileged classmates. Anyone who kills a Rat passes. Failure is not an option.

Marcus, and two fellow rats, Billy, his punkish friend, and Petra, his on again off again lover, have fled the carnage and are hiding in an abandoned tenement, hoping to survive the night.

Their chances aren't good, as Marcus' former-roommate-turned-ruthless-strategist Shabnam is using the chaos to rid himself of all competitors at the school, and Marcus is high on his hit list.

And then there are Marcus' onetime lover Saya and former best friend Willie, who are on the hunt as well. It would seem bonds of romance and friendship mean nothing when death is on the line.

It's Freshman Finals at Kings Dominion, and the body count is rising...

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WES CRAIG • Artist
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Variant Cover by Wes Craig.

DEADLY CLASS created by
Rick Remender & Wes Craig

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"BETTER TO SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES
OF LIVING FEARLESSLY THAN TO GROW
COMFORTABLE MOLD FROM SAFELY HIDING."



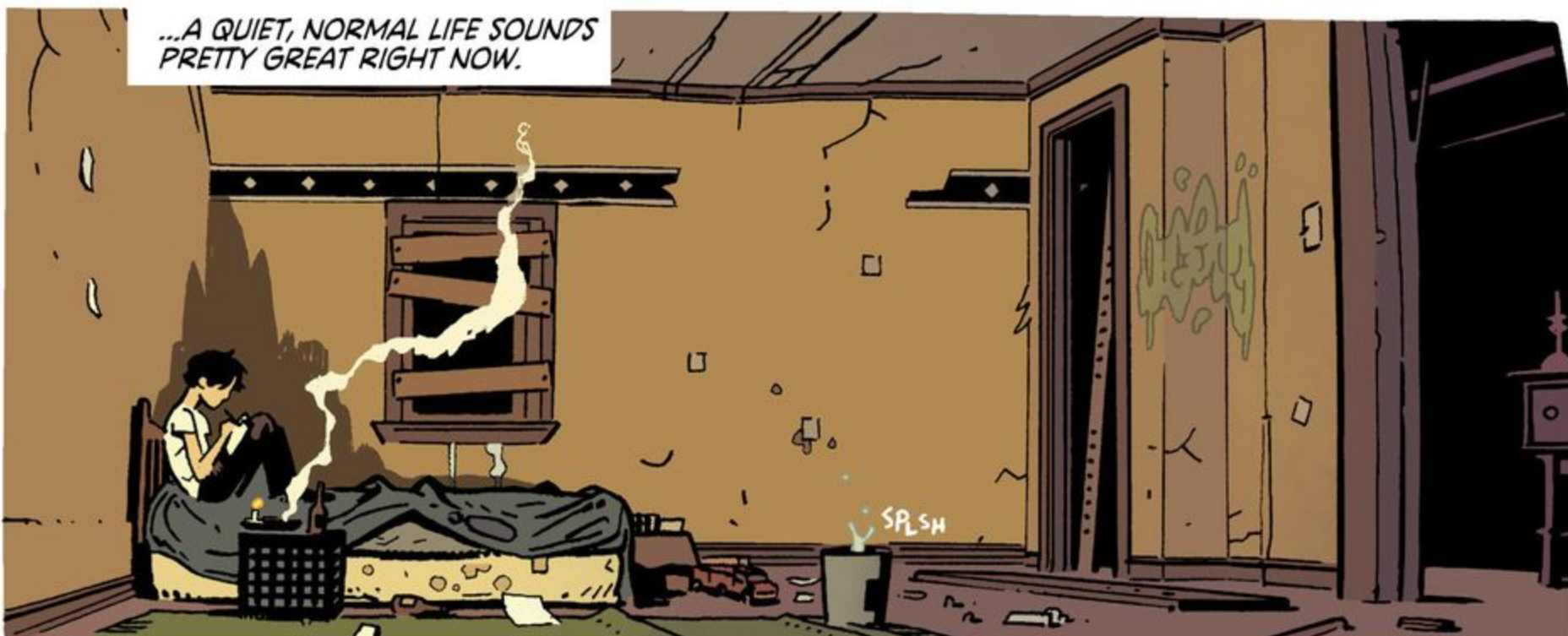
THAT WAS MY OPENING IN THIS
JOURNAL AT THE BEGINNING OF
THE YEAR.

A NUDGE TO TRY AND BE
SOMETHING I'M NOT.

THE SORT OF THING A PERSON
WRITES TO ADD SOME ROMANCE
TO LIVING THROUGH BAD TIMES.

TRUTH IS...

...A QUIET, NORMAL LIFE SOUNDS
PRETTY GREAT RIGHT NOW.



LIVING ON THE STREETS IS AWFUL
ENOUGH TO MAKE JOINING A
SCHOOL FOR ASSASSINS SEEM
LIKE A REASONABLE ALTERNA-
TIVE.

TELL YOURSELF THAT DECISION
WASN'T MADE ENTIRELY OUT OF
FEAR.

SOME LIES ARE TOO BIG TO SELL
YOURSELF.

NO ONE IS FEARLESS.



FEAR'S A REASONABLE REACTION
TO WHAT'S WAITING OUT THERE.

AN INSTINCT WE DEVELOPED FOR
GOOD REASON.

AND I AM AFRAID.

NOT JUST OF THE PEOPLE TRYING
TO KILL ME...

...BUT OF GOING BACK
TO WHERE I WAS.



BECAUSE EVEN IF WE SURVIVE ALL
OF THIS, EVEN IF WE DO MAKE IT
OUT OF SAN FRANCISCO, I'M
RIGHT BACK TO SQUARE ONE.

NO PARENTS.

NO FAMILY.

FACE ON THE FBI'S MOST
WANTED LIST FOR A CRIME I
DIDN'T COMMIT.

MY YEAR AT KINGS DOMINION
HAS BEEN A TORNADO OF
BULLSHIT...

...BUT I WASN'T
HOMELESS.



HOW IS IT THAT THIS NIGHTMARE
IS STILL SOMEHOW MORE
APPEALING TO ME THAN THAT
UNCERTAINTY?

WHAT IS THAT?

FEAR OF A LIFETIME
OUT HERE ALONE.

THE SAME FEAR THAT CAUSED
ME TO PUSH MARIA AWAY.
EVERYTHING RETURNS TO HER.

SHE MADE IT ALL BETTER.

MADE ME FEEL WANTED AND
NORMAL AND AT HOME.

WHEN I WAS WITH HER I
FORGOT HOW BAD IT WAS
BEFORE.



THE LAST WEEKEND WE WERE
TOGETHER SHE TOOK ME TO
THE PARK.

I ACTED LIKE I DIDN'T WANT
TO GO. TRUTH IS I REALLY
LIKED THAT SHE'D TALK ME INTO
GOING PLACES WITH HER.

THAT SHE WANTED ME
IN HER LIFE THAT MUCH.

THE SUN ON THE WATER
MADE THE SWANS LOOK
GOLDEN LIKE ANGELS.



SHE SQUEEZED MY HAND,
LOOKING FOR A BIT OF
IDENTIFICATION IN THE
MOMENT WE SHARED.

I DIDN'T RETURN IT.
I STOOD STILL, A
SULLEN, TEENAGE
CLICHÉ TRYING TO
HIDE HIS SMILE.

BECAUSE GOD IS
WAITING FOR ME
TO CRACK, TO SHOW THE
RELIEF, TO BE HAPPY, AND
ONCE I DO...



...IT'LL ALL DISAPPEAR.

BUT THE SWANS
GAVE ME AWAY.

I WAS
HAPPY AND
SHE COULD
SEE IT.

IT'S
BEAUTIFUL,
ISN'T IT?

AND THAT
MADE ME
ANGRY.



THE IMPERFECTIONS I'D
TRAINED MYSELF TO
FIXATE ON SNAPPED BACK.

MARIA'S LOVE MORPHED
INTO NEEDINESS.

WHY CAN'T I EVER
JUST ENJOY SOMETHING
THAT'S GOOD WHILE IT'S
HAPPENING.

IT'S JUST A
MANMADE LAKE
FULL OF
SLOW-WITTED
WATER
INSECTS.





BECAUSE WHEN I FINALLY GOT WHAT I WANTED ALL I DID WAS WORRY ABOUT LOSING IT.

HAPPINESS REGISTERS TO ME AS A DISAPPOINTMENT UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

THE LAST TIME I SAW HER I'D REALIZED THAT.

AND I FINALLY CHOSE NOT TO CARE ANYMORE.

BUT TURNS OUT GOD WAS WAITING FOR ME TO SMILE, TO SHOW HIM THAT I WANTED HER, BECAUSE ONCE I DID...



...HE TOOK HER AWAY.

THEY TOLD ME SHE'D RUN AWAY. THEY KNEW I'D BUY IT.

IT FIT MY EXPECTATIONS.

BECAUSE THE TRUTH WAS TOO FUCKING STUPID, TOO FUCKING OBVIOUS.

SHE WAS GOING TO MASTER LIN'S OFFICE.



IT WAS RIGHT THERE AND I IGNORED IT.

BECAUSE WHAT COULD I DO ABOUT IT?

I SWEAR TO GOD, MARIA, I'M GOING TO GET OUT OF THIS ALIVE.

AND ONE DAY, WHEN HE LEAST EXPECTS IT, I'M GOING TO COME BACK...



...AND I WILL DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

HE WAS ONE OF VIKTOR'S GUYS.

WHAT COULD DO THIS?

POISON. PETRA'S HANDIWORK.

LOOK OVER HERE--



THEY USED THAT CAMBODIAN BOOBY-TRAP FROM CLASS.

ONLY VIKTOR COULD HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THAT KIND OF IMPACT.

GODDAMN, SAYA. MARCUS' CREW ARE CAPABLE OF THIS?



THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE.

AND NEITHER DO WE.

YOU GET THAT NOW, RIGHT?





"BY THE TIME I WENT BACK INTO THE PARTY I THOUGHT I WAS MR. ROGERS.

"A WARM-HEARTED CHARACTER BELOVED BY ALL.

"KAREN LOOKED UPSET, BUT I KNEW IT WASN'T BECAUSE I WAS SCREAMING AT HER FRIENDS. IT WAS OBVIOUSLY BECAUSE THE PARTY WAS SO LAME.

"THEY NEEDED ME TO WELCOME THEM TO MY NEIGHBORHOOD.

"THEY NEEDED MORAL INSTRUCTION."



"I'D FOUND A BOX OF RAISINS IN A CABINET IN THE KITCHEN AND RAN AROUND GIVING THEM EACH LITTLE TONES OF WISDOM. A FEW RACIALLY INSENSITIVE COMMENTS WERE BANDIED ABOUT.

"I TOLD THEM THAT EVERYONE SEES COLOR; IT'S ALL ABOUT THE INTELLECTUAL CHOICE TO NOT JUDGE BASED ON IT.

"WHEN ANYONE TRIED TO GET AWAY FROM ME I THREW RAISINS AT THEM. CHIP FRATSWORTH DIDN'T LOVE THAT AND SO HE PUSHED ME DOWN."



"AFTER A WHILE, THEY FORGOT I WAS THERE. I BECAME AN OUTSIDE OBSERVER TO THIS STRANGE BAND OF ASSHOLES.

"THEY WERE ALL LAUGHING WITH EACH OTHER, LIKE BEST FRIENDS.

"BUT AS SOON AS SOMEONE LEFT THE ROOM THE OTHERS ALL GANGED UP TO TEAR DOWN THE ABSENT 'FRIEND.'"



THEY WERE THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO ONLY KNEW HOW TO BOND BY SHITTING ON SOMEONE WHO WASN'T IN THE ROOM.

IT MADE ME REALLY MISS YOU GUYS. FOR ALL OF OUR FAULTS... WE'RE NOT **THEM**.

YOU WANT ME TO PUT ON SOME ENYA, CAPTAIN SENSITIVE?



SOMETIMES WHEN SOMEONE SEEMS TO GO CRAZY WHAT THEY'RE ACTUALLY DOING IS LETTING EVERYONE SEE WHAT THEY USUALLY HIDE INSIDE.

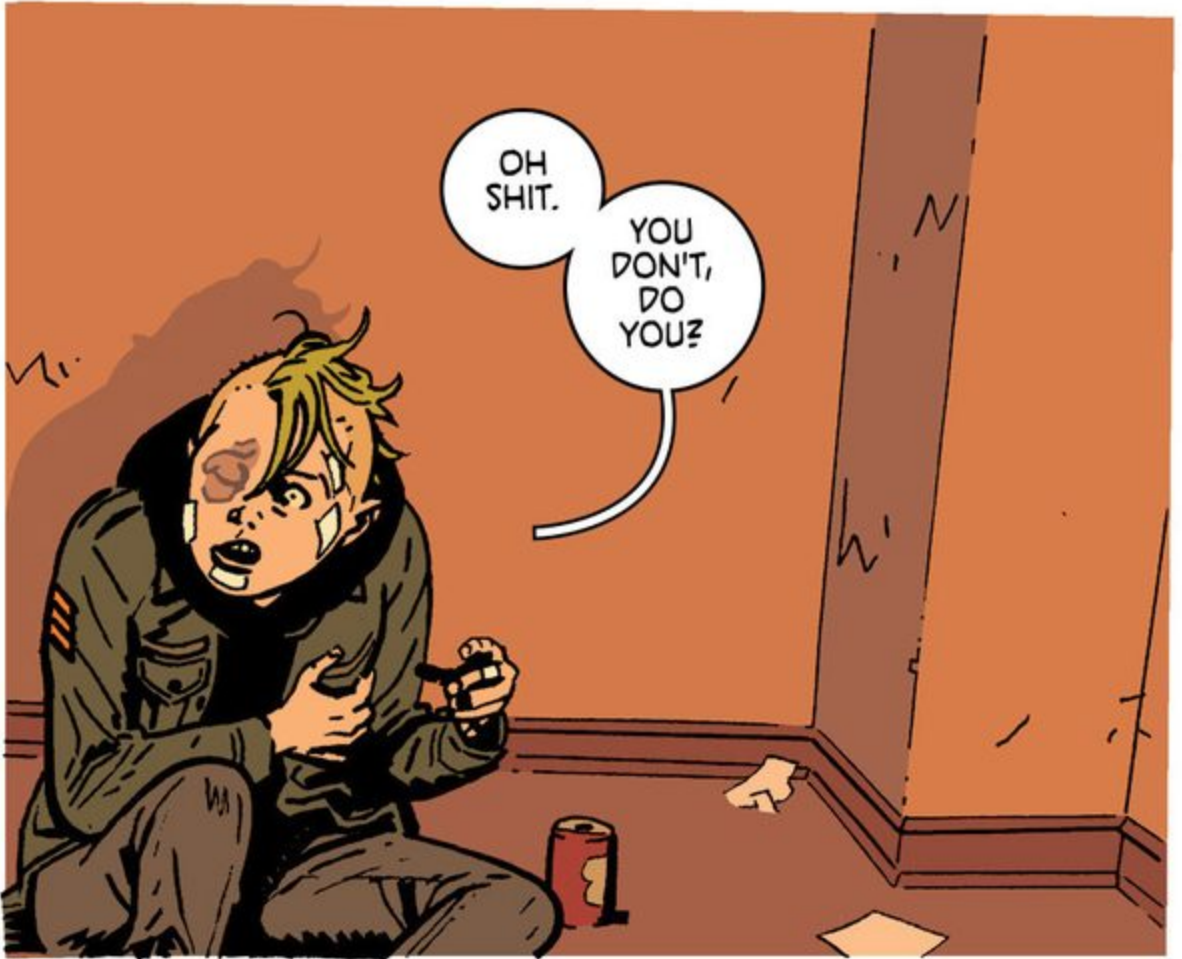
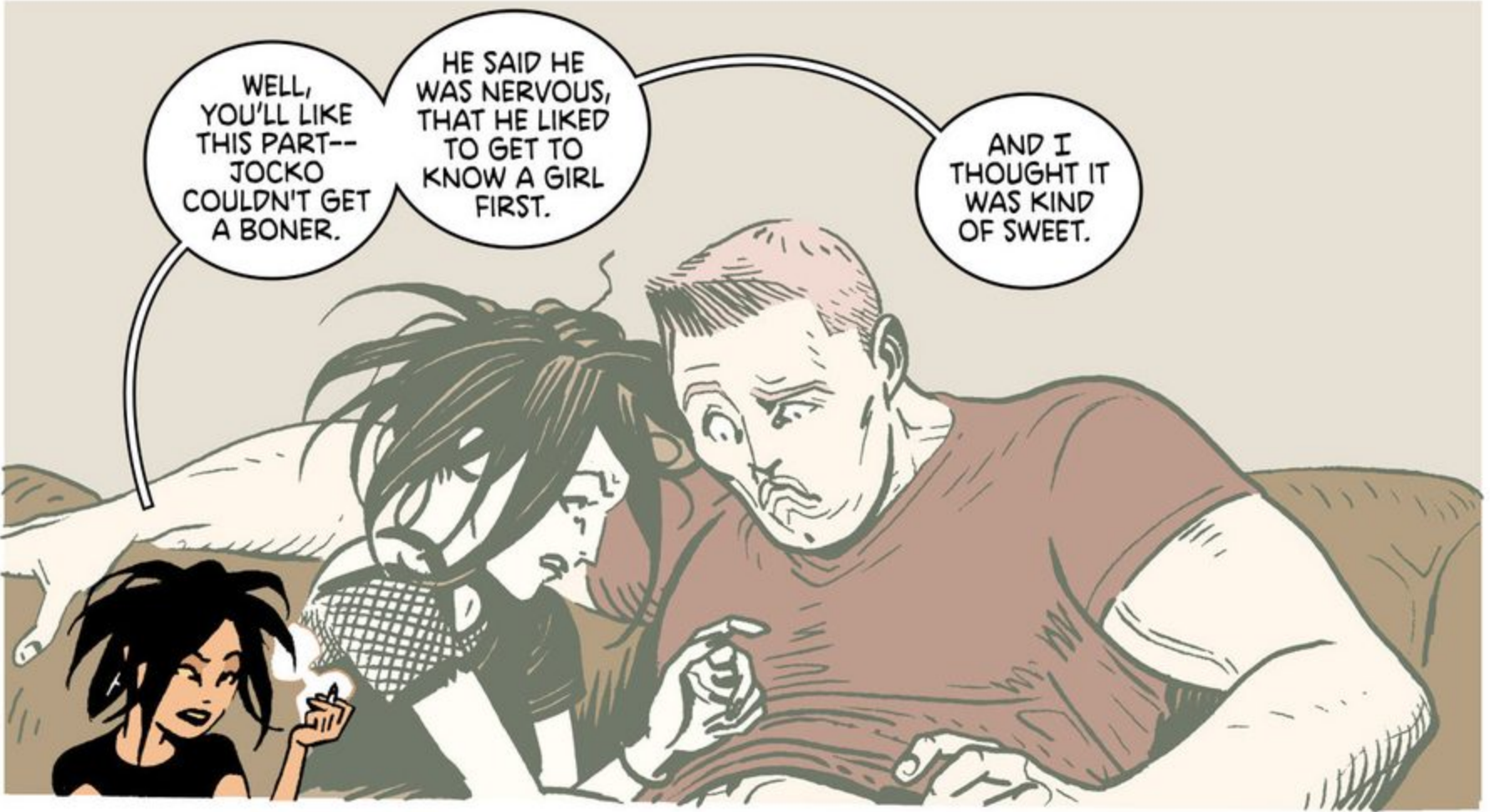
DRUGS ARE JUST A GOOD EXCUSE TO LET THE TRUE SPAZ COME OUT.

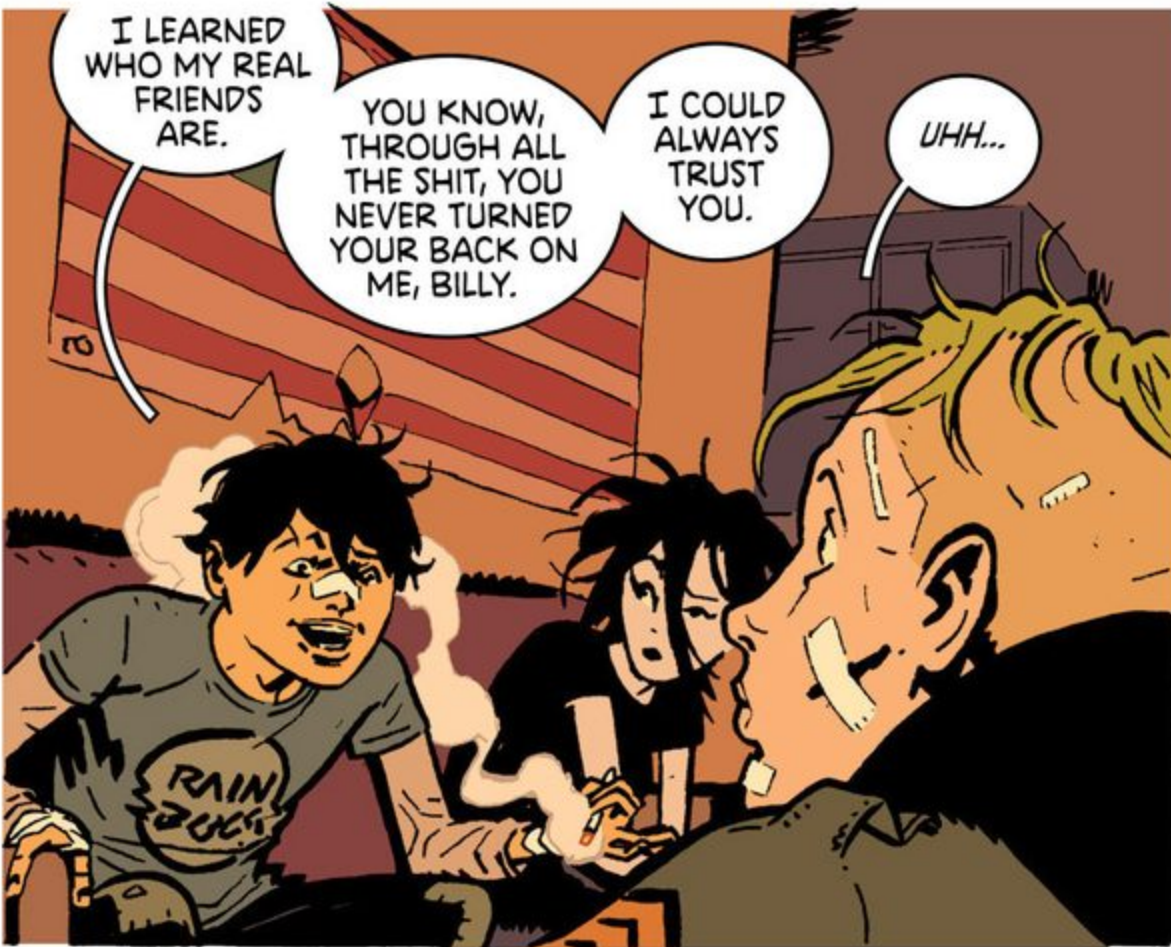
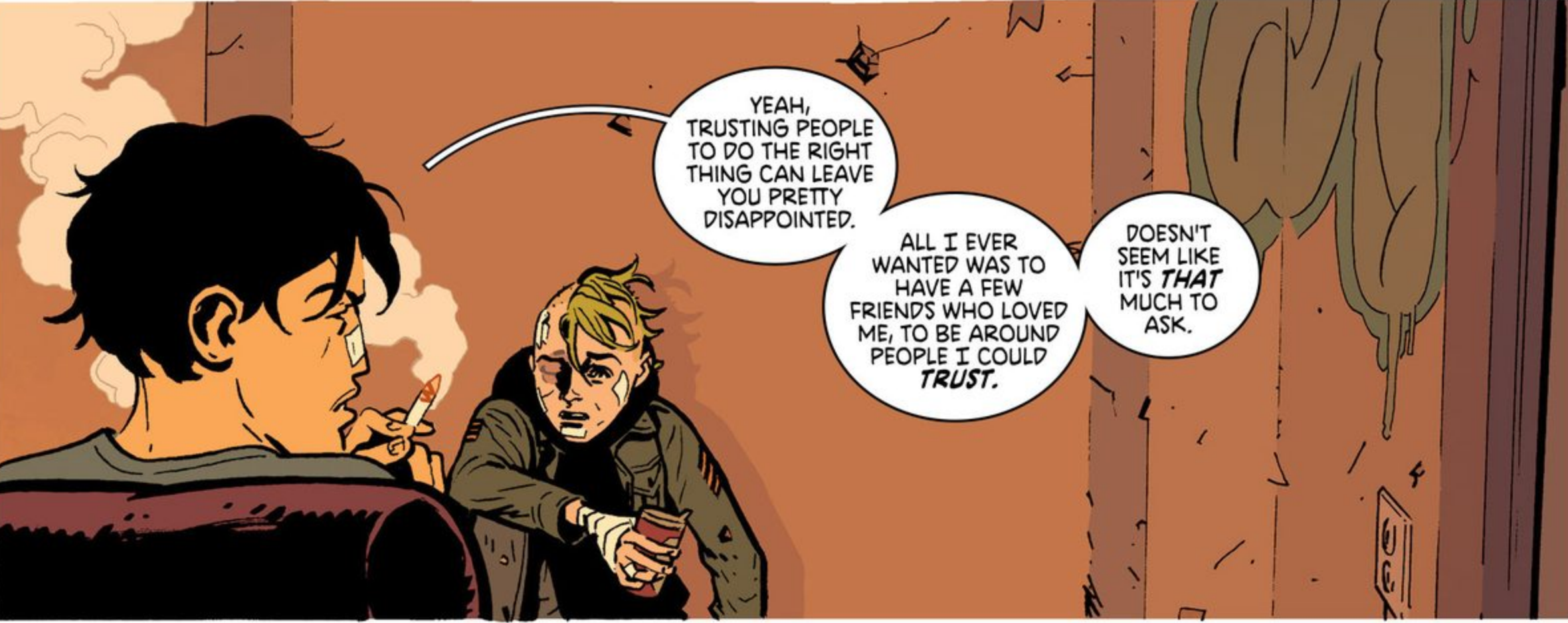
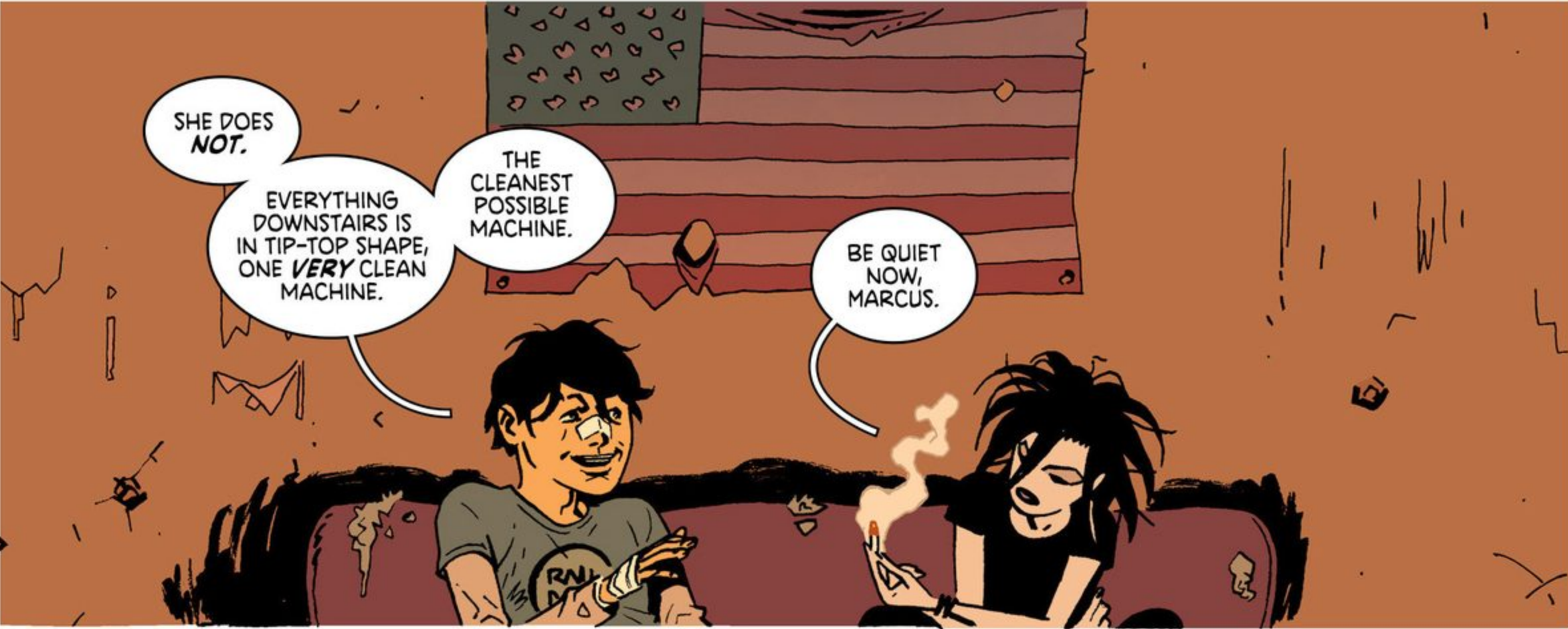


OR AN EXCUSE TO DO SOMETHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO.

LAST TIME I DID COKE I TRIED TO FUCK VIKTOR.













SHOULDN'T SNEAK UP. I'M A BIT TWITCHY. TENDS TO MAKE ME STABBY.

DUDE.

THERE'S A MOB OF PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO WOULD *LOVE* THE CREDIT FOR *KILLING* YOU, AND YOU FALL ASLEEP?



I DIDN'T MEAN TO. OKAY? MOVING ON. PLEASE?

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW DICKED UP EVERYTHING IS.

HOW LONG 'TIL FINALS ARE OVER?

SUNRISE ISN'T FOR ANOTHER SEVEN HOURS.



BUT WE'VE GOT ANOTHER PROBLEM. SHABNAM HAS PICTURES OF US.

OF US...

YES.

ONE OF HIS PEOPLE ON THE OUTSIDE HAS COPIES AND IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO SHABNAM--



--THE PICTURES GO TO OUR FATHERS.

OH, MY. THAT *WON'T* GO OVER WELL IN EITHER CASE.

DOESN'T MATTER. IT'S NEVER GOING TO HAPPEN.

WHAT DOES SHABNAM WANT?



HE WANTS ME TO KILL YOU.

THAT BITCH.

AND IF YOU DON'T HE'S GOING TO SEND THE PICTURES?

YES.

BUT YOU HAVE A PLAN.



YOU KNOW I DO.

WHILE MY DAD WAS IN THE CIA'S MKULTRA HE PUT TOGETHER QUITE THE COLLECTION OF POWERFUL TRUTH SERUMS.

WHEN I WAS HOME FOR CHRISTMAS I STOLE SOME.

WE'RE GOING TO KIDNAP SHABNAM, JUICE HIM UP, FIND OUT WHO HAS THOSE PICTURES...

"...AND THEN WE'RE GOING TO HURT HIM REALLY BAD."

NOTHING IS WORSE THAN HAVING TO HEAR PEOPLE EXPLAIN WHY THEY ARE OWED SOMETHING, SHABNAM THINKS TO HIMSELF.

NEW WORLD ORDER AND THE SPIRIT SQUAD ARGUE OVER PARTIAL CREDIT FOR SOFTENING UP MARCUS.

BUT HIS MIND IS ELSEWHERE, ON THINGS THAT **MATTER--**



--SUCH AS WHAT **HE** IS OWED.

IF SAYA KILLS MARCUS SHE'LL RECEIVE THE CREDIT. SHE'LL TAKE VALEDICTORIAN FROM HIM.

BUT THAT WON'T HAPPEN.

HE'S MADE ARRANGEMENTS TO ENSURE SHE IS DEALT WITH.



STILL, HUMAN ERROR IS ALWAYS A FACTOR.

SURROUNDED BY BICKERING IDIOTS AS HE IS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO TRUST ANY OF THEIR COMPETENCY.

SHE **CLEARLY** DOESN'T RESPECT YOU.



THE SPIRIT SQUAD WILL GET NOTHING.

AND SO HE WAITED.

AND HE ATE.

THE SIX PACKS OF HOSTESS SNO BALLS SATIATED HIS NERVES FOR A TIME, BUT THAT WARMTH WAS FLEETING...



...AND NOW THE WAITING WAS EATING AWAY AT HIM.

HE WOULD DO **WHATEVER** HE HAD TO.

STAB ANY BACK STUPID ENOUGH TO TURN TO HIM. CRUSH ENEMY AND ALLY ALIKE.

THIS IS **BULLSHIT!**



AND NOW ONE LAST PIECE.

TO STAY IN POWER-- HE MUST RECEIVE CREDIT FOR MARCUS' DEATH.

WE WON'T PUT UP WITH THIS, YOU **FUCKING NERD!**



TELL HER FRIENDS YOU CAUGHT HER GOING DOWN ON ONE OF THE MEXICANS.

MARCUS WILL BE DEAD WITHIN THE HOUR.

THIS IS A FORGONE CONCLUSION.



EVEN IF HIS INITIAL AGENTS FAIL TO KILL MARCUS, HE HAS A NEW ACE UP HIS SLEEVE.

A TRAITOR IN MARCUS' CAMP.

THIS NEW ALLY WOULD CALL AS SOON AS THE MATTER WAS CONCLUDED.



AND SO HE WAITED.

WAITED FOR THE CALL THAT WOULD, ONCE AND FOR ALL...



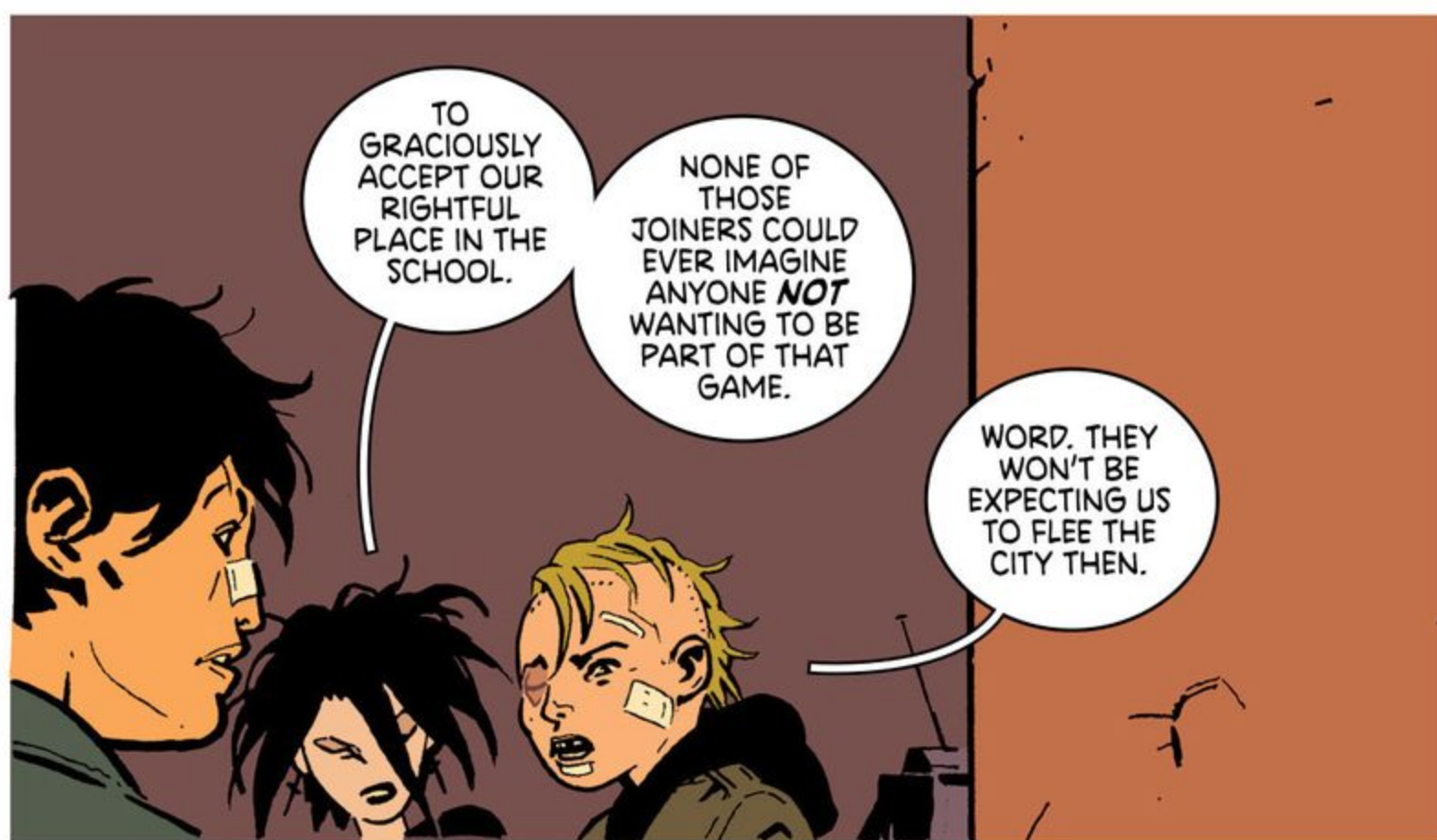


...SHOW THEM ALL WHO TRULY RULED THE SCHOOL.

OKAY, SO AFTER 8 AM, WHEN THE SUN IS UP, NO ONE CAN GET CREDIT FOR KILLING RATS ANYMORE.

YEAH, MAN. SEVEN HOURS LEFT TO STAY ALIVE.

THEY'LL BE EXPECTING US TO CRAWL BACK IF WE DO.



TO GRACIOUSLY ACCEPT OUR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN THE SCHOOL.

NONE OF THOSE JOINERS COULD EVER IMAGINE ANYONE **NOT** WANTING TO BE PART OF THAT GAME.

WORD. THEY WON'T BE EXPECTING US TO FLEE THE CITY THEN.



SO, WE HIDE--WAIT OUT THE CLOCK UNTIL THEY STOP HUNTING.

IN THE MORNING, AS SOON AS THERE ARE PEOPLE ON THE STREET, WE CAN DISAPPEAR, SLIP INTO THE CROWD.



WE TAKE THE MUNI TO DALY CITY AND FROM THERE WE HITCHHIKE TO SAN JOSE.



REMEMBER, IF WE GET SEPARATED--STICK TO THE PLAN.

LEX WAS GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.



MAKE SOME IMPORTANT CHANGES TO THE WORLD.



UNTIL YOU SCUMBAGS PULLED HIM INTO YOUR DRUG ADDICT BULLSHIT.







"KEEP AN EYE ON HIM."

I'M OUT.
GIVE ME
YOUR
CLIP!

CAN'T
WAIT TO SEE
SHABNAM'S FACE
WHEN WE TAKE
FULL CREDIT FOR
THESE--

POISON
SMOKE KEEPS
US FROM
ENTERING BUT
ALSO ONLY GIVES
THEM ONE
WAY OUT.



SHUT
IT.

LISTEN--



MARCUS.



CLIP!
NOW!



YOO-
HOO.



SMALL ADVICE--
WHEN HIDING
ONE SHOULD
NOT TO SMASH
WINDOW.

SEX+POT



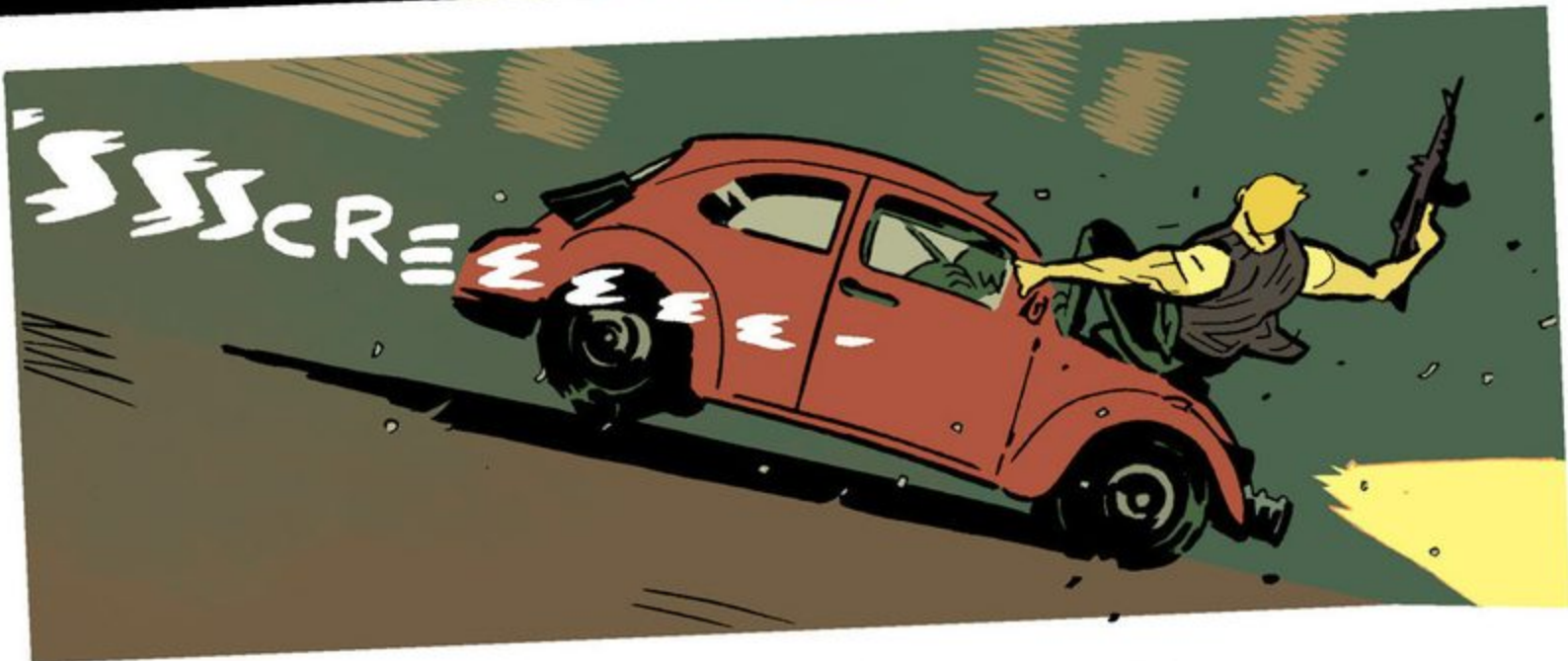
LET'S US
SEE HOW
LIMP MY
DICK IS.

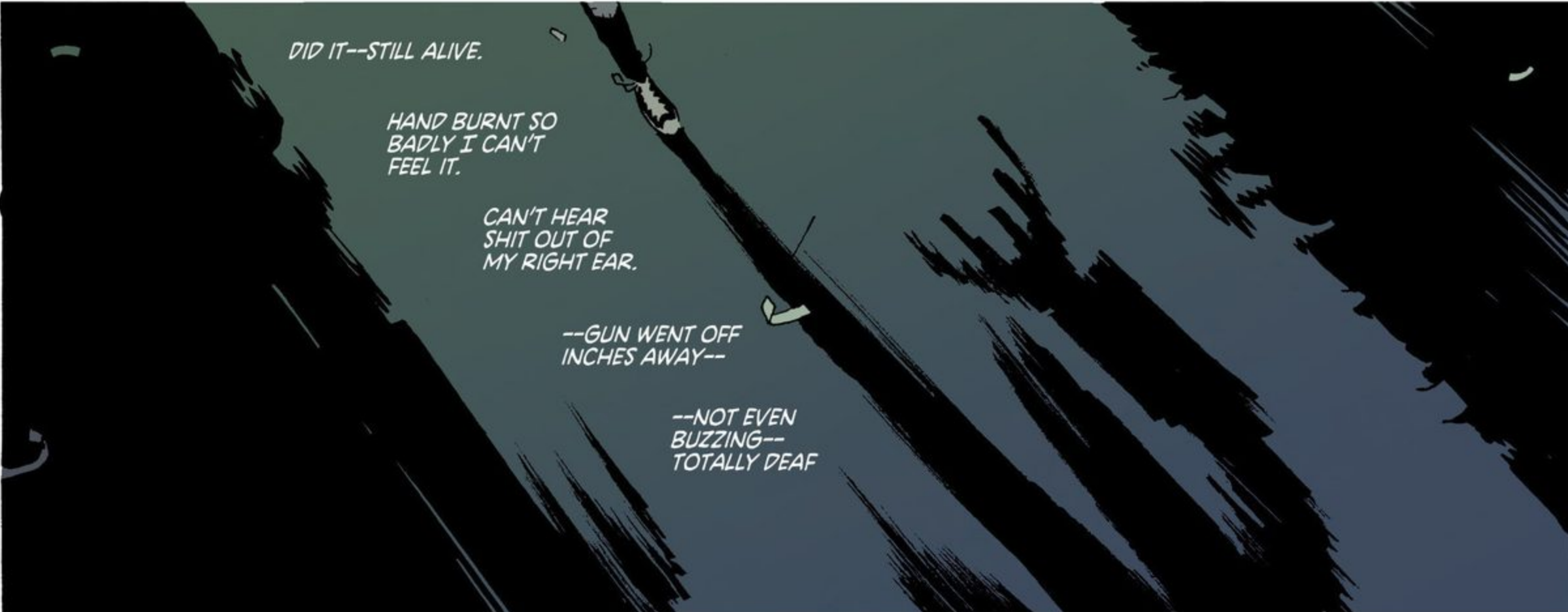
PARTY
TIME IS OVER,
MOTHERFUCKER!













MORE SIRENS.

THAT COP THINKS
HE HAS VIKTOR DEAD
TO RIGHTS. NO IDEA
WHAT HE'S DEALING
WITH.

NOT MY
PROBLEM.

WORLD FULL
OF LUNATICS--

WEE-O
WEE-O



BILLY AND PETRA
SHOULD BE LONG
GONE.

FUCK.

HOW DID
VIKTOR
FIND US?

TRACKED
US?

SWISH

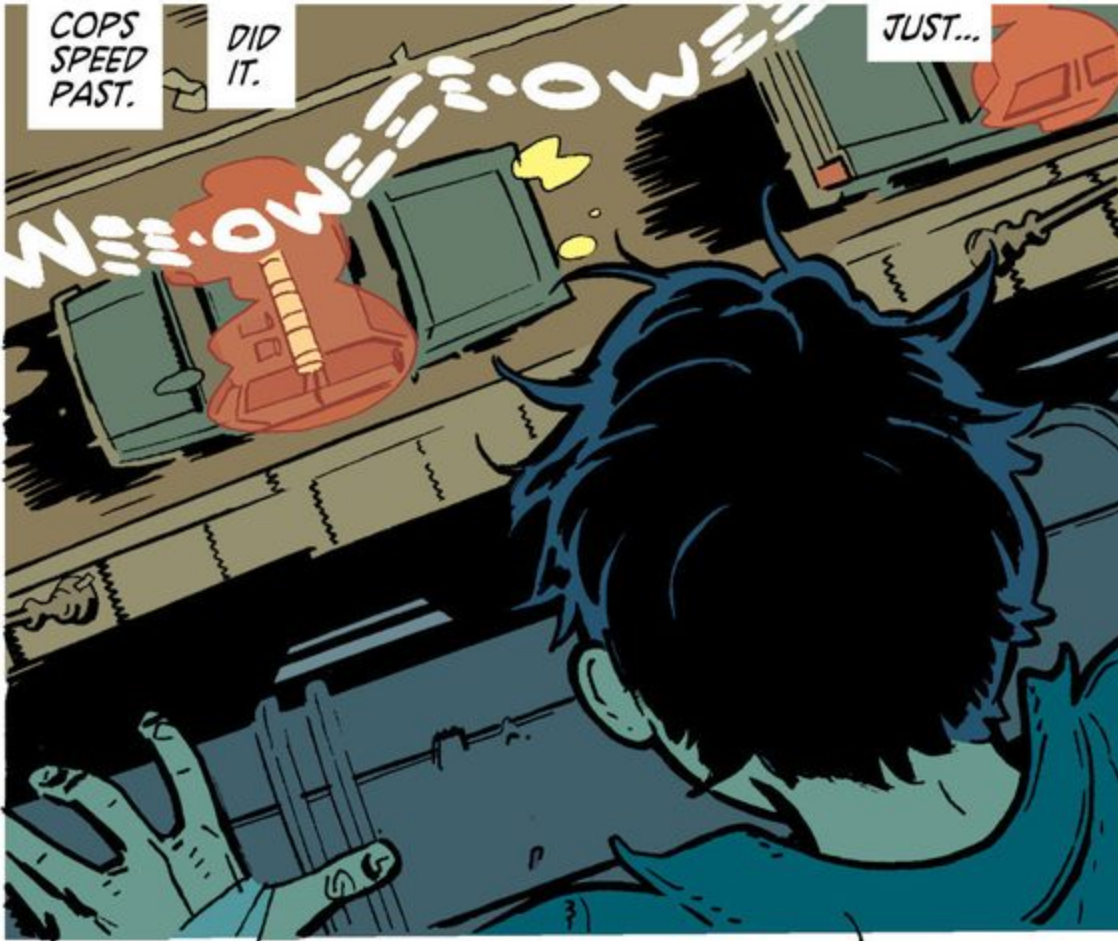


MADE SURE
NOT TO LEAVE
A TRAIL.

TOK



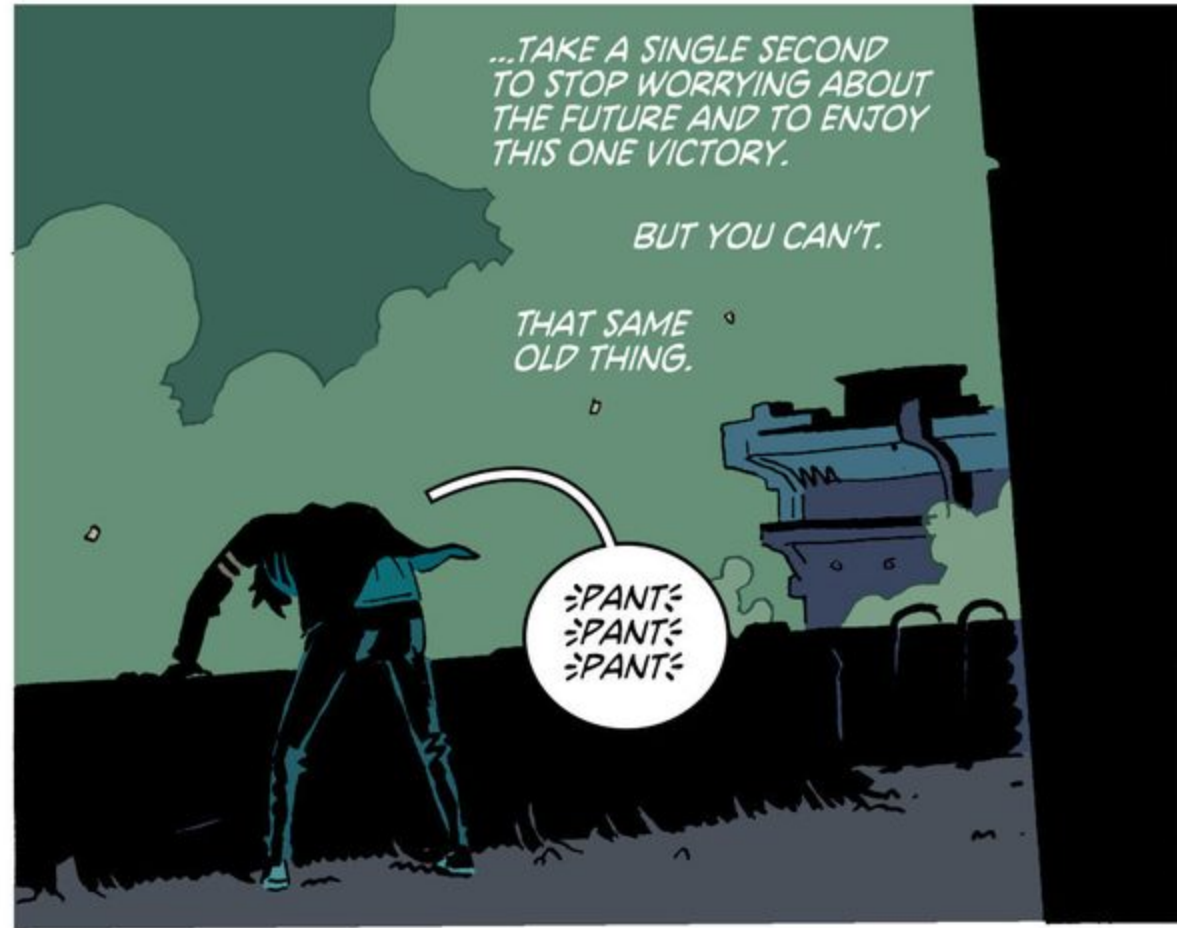
WEE-O



COPS
SPEED
PAST.

DID
IT.

JUST...



...TAKE A SINGLE SECOND
TO STOP WORRYING ABOUT
THE FUTURE AND TO ENJOY
THIS ONE VICTORY.

BUT YOU CAN'T.

THAT SAME
OLD THING.

≡PANT≡
≡PANT≡
≡PANT≡



CERTAIN THAT GOD IS
WAITING FOR ME TO
CRACK, TO SHOW SOME
RELIEF, AND ONCE I DO...

CELEBRATING?

...HE'LL TAKE IT ALL AWAY.

YOU'RE A
LONG FUCKIN'
STRETCH FROM
CELEBRATING,
ARGUELLO.



TO BE CONTINUED...

DEAD LETTER OFFICE

Hey Rick, lately I've been feeling pretty shitty to be quite honest. I can't find the motivation to do anything productive and everything feels useless. I've realized that the only thing this past month that has kept me from trying to do something I'd regret is how it'd affect my family and that's not a good enough reason to still be here. I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but this is how it is. There's nothing beautiful about it; I'm just not coping well.

That's what I love about the characters in DEADLY CLASS. They're greatly flawed but somehow you can still find a way to make them beautiful. DEADLY CLASS is my favorite comic and I want to thank you for making me feel a little less alone while I cope.

L.

RR - Life can be relentless in the sheer quantity of bullshit it piles on. I'm sad to hear you're having such a hard time. I will say that if it's to the point where you're actually considering checking out you owe it to yourself to talk to somebody. You'd be amazed at what a therapist can help guide you through. So often having someone to talk to is the key to making it through tumultuous times in life. You have a family and people who love you, so be honest with them about where you're at. But don't deal with it all on your own. Too often our own brains can be our worst enemies. Therapists often work on sliding scales depending on your income, go out and find somebody to talk to. Do it today.

Hello, Mr. Remender. I've been reading several of your creator-owned series (DEADLY CLASS, *Black Science*, *Tokyo Ghost*, and *Low*) and recently picked up your newest series *Devolution*.

I enjoy reading your "Transmissions from a Basement". The pure talent you have working with you on those series is outstanding. Each series has distinct artwork and all of it is amazing.

I've been meaning to contact you for some time now. I feel that your writing in each of these series is phenomenal. I'm heavily attached to DEADLY CLASS and would not drop any of your series. I'd give up food before I

stopped buying / supporting your wonderful work.

I hope you get enough support from the fans to continue working for yourself and putting out the material YOU want. I enjoy all of these series and love the mix of comedy and pure emotional tension.

Thank you for being a great artist, writer, animator, and cool dude. I wish you continued success and look forward to your current and future comic book series.

P.S. - I'm still waiting on my closure for Maria of DEADLY CLASS, I hope she has not been slain and can reunite with her boy Marcus and bestie Saya.

P.P.S. - I'm not always up to date on each series, I have my comics shipped to me via DCBS at the end of each month. My local comic scene is experiencing a bit of a slump and the few stores that do offer comic books always offer it as a secondary product and not the main attraction.

RR - Thanks for the kind words and support. Transitioning back to working for myself was certainly frightening but the support we've been shown has helped ease the anxiety. Nothing is more satisfying than making personal, unique comic books with a specific flavor that might not be palatable to everyone but the people who like it love it. That's why we're doing this, and you make it possible for us to make the kinds of books we want to make.

To Rick Remender and Wes Craig

First off I want to congratulate you on yet another thrilling, well-crafted issue. Speaking as someone who is both a film and art major and a comics fanatic of both new and old material, DEADLY CLASS is by far one the most fun and emotionally raw stories I have ever witnessed in any medium. It also by far one the coolest comics series out in the market today.

From an artistic standpoint alone Wes Craig, in my opinion, is really making a name for himself with this series and reminding the rest of us comics can be more than pretty splash pages and stiff rigid characters and panels. What I really liked the most in part one of

this new chapter DIE FOR ME was the scene of Marcus running out of the school auditorium. Most times in comics this comes off as very static and dull. But Craig's use of what I guess you would call a "Dolly Zoom effect" really gives life to the movement of the character and the panel itself.

Rick, I do have one question I would like to ask you. In this latest issue, you have Shabnam bring up that his father is in banking and Kendal's family background is in CIA. Now I assume your building a purposely connection between Big Business and Government etc. But it would seem to me that in the course of last two issues you're more sympathetic to Kendal (CIA, Government) than to Shabnam (Big Business). Now is this on my part over thing it or is there truth here?

Peter B.

RR - Wes is going to go down in history as one of the most innovative artists the industry has ever seen. He's not only an astounding illustrator who can convey emotion and draw pretty much anything, he is one of the most capable storytellers we've seen in comics in a long time. It's a pleasure when the pages come in to see what new ways Wes is devised to convey the story.

I'm not a fan of corporations having the same rights as individuals and I think any company that grows so large that employees become little more than cogs in a giant machine is a huge problem. Profits become all that matter and the machine rolls over mankind. I'm also terrified of government invasions of our privacy and a bloated military. How I'm handling those two characters doesn't have anything to do with what they represent necessarily, they're products of two systems that run our daily lives, for sure, but in the end, they are kids in a terrible place pushed to compete against one another with terrible stakes. Just like all of us.

Next issue it all falls apart.

**See you in 30,
*Rick***

FAN ART

BY LOU VICTOR KARNAS





TRANSMISSIONS FROM A BASEMENT

TAKING 'LOW' TO NEW HEIGHTS INTERVIEW WITH RICK FROM COMICBOOK.COM

By Jamie Lovett

Fans of Rick Remender & Greg Tocchini's Image Comics series **LOW** should prepare to ascend from the depths. After a brief hiatus, the series is returning with a brand new story arc, "Shore of the Dying Light," kicking off in February's **LOW** #11.

The new story arc promises to show a side of **LOW**'s world that the creative team has been eager to reveal, with post-apocalyptic family drama to fuel the narrative fire.

The prolific Remender took some time from schedule to talk to **ComicBok.com** about what fans should expect from **LOW**'s next act.

*Can you remind our readers of where we've been so far with **LOW**, and tell us where we're heading in the new story arc?*

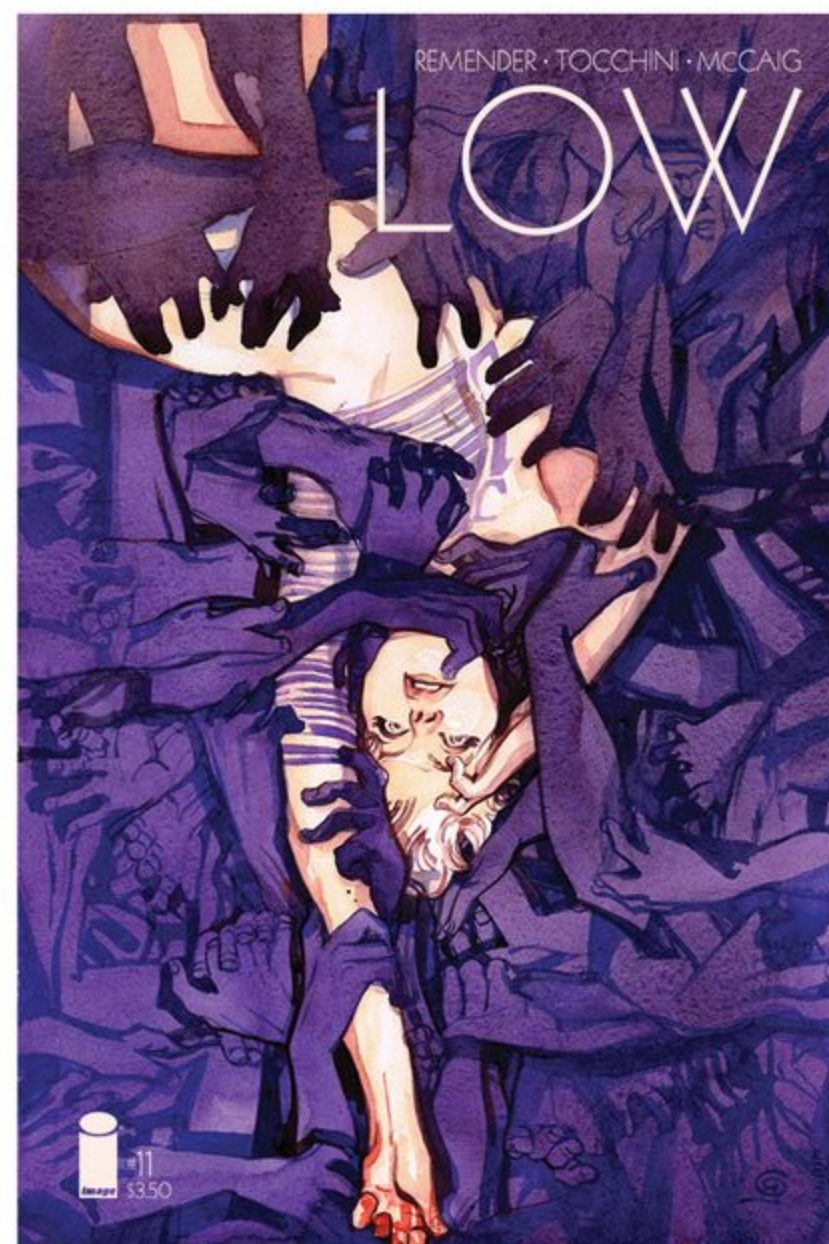
Rick Remender: The story follows Stel and her two daughters who have been separated during an attack many, many years ago. They all live at the bottom of the ocean, as do all humans, trying to protect themselves from the ever-expanding sun. This is many, many, many millions of years in the future, and mankind has moved down there while they seek out probes to find new worlds to move to. So the first ten issues, we followed Stel as she has tried to make her way up to the surface, basically to be the first human to set foot on the surface in tens of thousands of years, to go acquire this probe that has returned to Earth.

In the new arc, we're finally going to arrive there. We have two stories. We have Stel's story. Stel will finally find out what's on the surface and we get to see what's been mutating up there all these years. And then we have the other story with her daughters, Tajo and Della, who have been reunited; both of them raised in different cities by different mad men after being torn away from Stel when they were children. This is sort of the fun part of the story. I wanted to make sure we earned the buildup to the surface and earned the character beats before getting there. Now we're at a spot where we finally get to see what's going on up there and how Greg has designed it all, which is pretty fantastic.

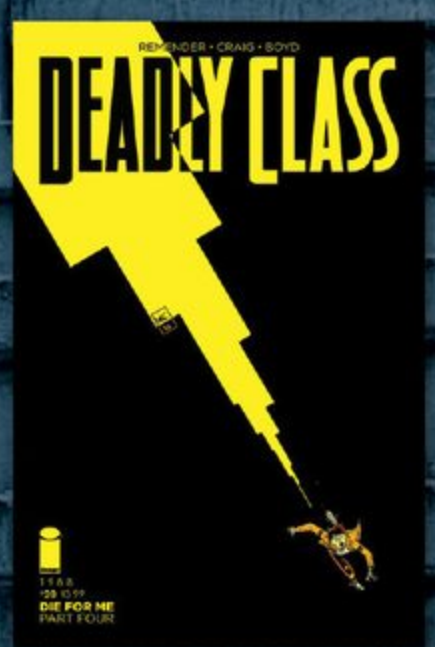
What can we expect to see from the relationship between Della and Tajo?

Rick Remender: They're very different people, and as we've been building up Della, she has been raised in a city where hope is illegal. Hope is seen as cruel and unusual punishment because there is no hope and they've been down there for so many thousands of years now that holding onto hope only drives people crazy. So they, in the city of Volden, have found that if you can crush art and literature and hope that everybody can go about their day understanding the realities they live in without being burdened with the notion that things will get better. So she stands as a counterweight to Stel, who has sort of an eternal, unquenchable optimism.

Then there's Tajo, who was raised in a city of pirates. She was sort of brainwashed and suffered a



BLACK SCIENCE
ISSUE #21



DEADLY CLASS
ISSUE #20



LOW
ISSUE #12



TOKYO GHOST
VOLUME 1

OUT
NOW

Stockholm-like syndrome dealing with her captor, who was the same man who killed her father. Now these two daughters are together with odd purpose. Tajo wants to go find Mom and help her in her mission, whereas Della has clearly drank the Kool-aid of Volden, and her desire is to only find Mother that she might crush the probe and do away with this false and cruel hope that her mother is spreading.

You mentioned that we're going to see the surface for the first time, and one of the coolest things about the series for me has been these fantastic, underwater bottle cities. You've got the library turned into a hedonistic pirate city, and you had Volden, the city without hope. What other kind of interesting places in the world might we visit in this coming arc?

Rick Remender: In terms of the world-building, I wanted to keep what's left of the bottom of the ocean limited, so all that was left at the beginning of the story was the three cities. There was Salis, which is sort of a democracy in collapse, there's Volden, which is sort of a totalitarian regime that is crushing hope, and then there was the third city, Paloma, which, like you said, was this once-vast library and storehouse for scientific liches, and it was taken over by debaucherous pirate types. That city has been destroyed by Tajo as she fled it, which plays a lot into her state of mind and what she has to look forward to coming up after what she's done.

The exciting stuff is now that we get to the surface, we get to see what's up there. So the world-building and that kind of fun, getting to have Greg create new things, there is a whole new batch of civilizations and wonderful cities to be had on the surface. I don't want to give away ... there's a number of surprises. Some of these things we've hinted at and seen in past issues, and we've shown glimpses of. Then there are a number of other things up there that we have not seen. So obviously, as Stel is seeking out the probe, she's going to come into contact with these many civilizations, which allows me to go a little bit nuts and kind of dig into my love for Kamandi and cook up wild new things that have been mutating on the surface of Earth while mankind has been cowering in the lower depths of the ocean.

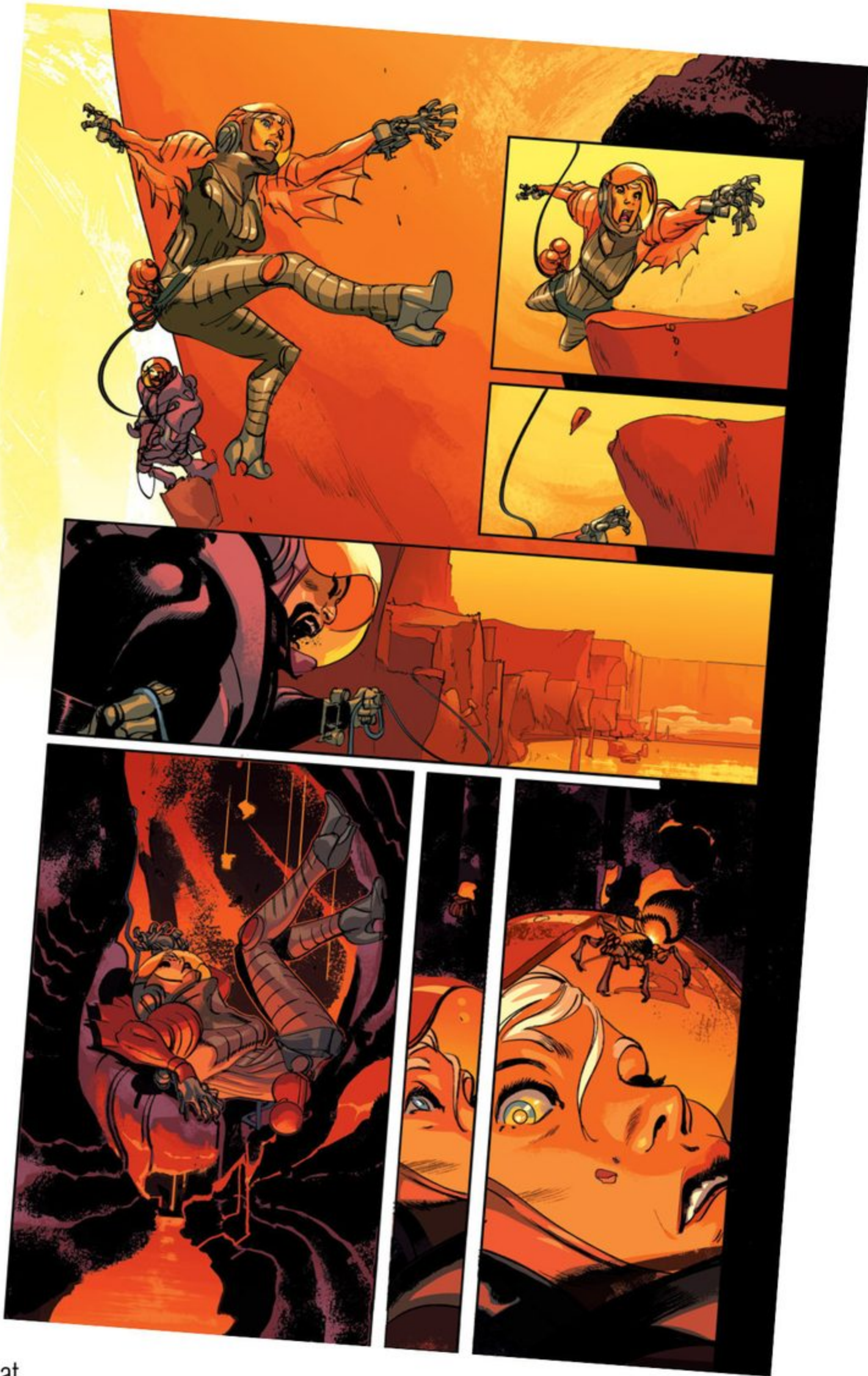
You mentioned it's the giant, burning sun that's caused man to retreat beneath the sea. As we go up, should we expect a landscape akin to the desert wastelands of Mad Max or Fallout, or is this one of the surprises that you have in store?

Rick Remender: Well, as it's many, many, many years in the future, and the sun has prematurely begun its expansion process, there is extreme radiation and heat on the surface. So the first area that Stel arrives on is very acrid, and it's been sun-bleached, and it's quite radioactive, so they have to stay in their suits to stay protected from it. But there are surprises to come. That is the first step onto the surface, but as she progresses, there is a lot of stuff been going on up there which is kind of one of the things that I've been really eager to

get to, the world-building that we've done up on the surface.

You work with a lot of talented artists on your creator-owned work. How is the relationship and the creative process with Greg Tocchini unique when compared to how you work with those other artists?

Rick Remender: Well Greg and I, we've established a strange working relationship. We started working together in 2008, 2009 on *The Last Days of American Crime*, and as we have progressed working together over the past seven years, we've kind of come in ... he doesn't speak English, he speaks Portuguese, and so we can't get on the phone or Skype. I get on the phone and I Skype with all of my artists, so Sean [Gordon Murphy], and Matteo [Scalera], and Wes [Craig], and John [Wayshak], and all the guys I'm working with, we spend a lot of time on the phone talking out ideas and visuals and stories.



And Greg and I don't. We can't do that. What do is I, every step of the way, I send Greg what I'm doing. So as we were developing this, I would send him a rough outline, and then Greg would do up some designs. And some of those designs were taken directly out of the outline, and some of them were just things that Greg saw in his head and drew. And then I would take those designs, and I would write character bits about them and send them back to Greg with ideas, and then he would sort of tweak and redesign, and then at the same time, I would incorporate them into the outline and keep some and discard others. It's a very organic process that is a collaboration that happens without words. As we're bouncing these things back and forth.

Oftentimes, what Greg designs is - the helmsuit, for example, became this amazing, huge part of the story and that was a lot because of the designs that he was turning in for what initially was just an aquatic suit. When I recognized that this one design he had done was so special, then that kind of struck me as, "Wow. The helmsuit is special. What if there's only one of them?" And that gave the Caine family something that made them a little more unique in this world. So as the story kind of develops, we bounce these things back and forth, and it has a very fun and organic and collaborative methodology that ends up in something that is equal parts both of us.

One of the interesting elements of the series is how you've taken the philosophy of magical thinking and turned it into a kind of a religion within the world of LOW. We've seen little glimpses of Stel with her mentor in that religion or philosophy, and I was wondering if that's going to remain a background element, or if that's something we might explore in the future?

Rick Remender: I definitely plan to do a little more. The religion itself is based on some interesting aspects of science and quantum theory about objects not actually taking their form until they're viewed. Which is really heady stuff, but it got me thinking as I was reading about it that if what's inside a present that's given to me doesn't actually solidify in form into that present - meaning that the reality I live in and the various possibilities of what are in there is a Roulette wheel until I open it and look at it - then the molecules form into this reality's version of what was in that present. And this is stuff I've seen in documentaries, and read about quite a bit on futurism sites and new science. It's very fascinating that life could have an effect on choosing the reality that it's in, and I got to think that, what if your optimism, what if your perspective on something were actually to inform if it was a good thing or a bad thing inside that box?

And that's really where Stel's religion and the quantumology comes from. And we will see that dug into a little bit more and see some interesting things happen with that. Hopefully surprising and fun. I don't want to give it away, but yeah, we're definitely building to some stuff with that.

You've built this kind of spectrum of optimism between Della and Stel. Where would you put yourself on that spectrum? Are you more in tune with Stel's

irrational optimism, or more with Della's extreme pessimism?

Rick Remender: I'd say I probably fall in the middle. The pendulum is always sort of swinging. There are days when writing Stel is easy for me, and there are days when, in order to sell the notion of that optimism, and to sell the notion of how she buys into this, is very difficult. *Low*#10 is one of the things, frankly, I'm most proud of in my career, but it was very, very, very difficult for me, because I had to sell, not only to the reader, but to myself how Stel holds onto this somewhat irrational optimism in the face of all of the horror that she's up against. It all felt, not trite the first two, three, four drafts, it just felt easy, and it felt like there were holes in it that I was glossing over and expecting people to just take with a grain of salt and move on. I didn't want to do that.

So I had to write pages and pages, and do a ton of research, and really get my head into her ability to maintain a positive attitude in the face of this stuff. That was quite difficult because I guess I lean a bit pessimistic as a person. In doing this exercise, and as somebody who leans pessimistic, it was quite cathartic. There was something really nice about it by the end, that I had found a way to sell myself on the notion of this, and hopefully maybe some readers, too. And based on the reaction we've had from the issue, I think we succeeded.

The series seems to spend a lot of time bringing its characters to their breaking point, only to have them snap back. Do you find that to be emotionally exhausting in any way, to have to dredge up that kind of dark place for them to go just so that you can pull them back out of it?

Rick Remender: I don't know if it's emotionally exhausting to write it. I know that I have to find ways to make them earn their ascension, and to earn their continued success, especially Stel. She had to earn that optimism, and obviously we'd seen her go through some terrible things in the first arc, so I wanted to take a moment to have her really start to question it, and to finally get to the darkest point in her story, where she had to really look very, very closely at it and analyze whether or not she could find a way to continue it, given the losses she had suffered and how hopeless things were.

It just feels to me, in a story like that, if you're not going to have them up against the most insurmountable wall possible and at the lowest point, then what they earn coming out the other end of it isn't as sweet. So for Stel, getting to finally make it to the surface and having risen up through all of this, it was a metaphor, obviously. Ultimately, what I think it does is it makes the character earn what they get out at the other end, and hopefully makes the reader going on that roller coaster journey, where you go down and then back up, hopefully the counterweight of the dark versus the light increases the joy when you see the character getting closer to what they want.

NEXT ISSUE

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